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The Conspirator

Philby's Biggest Coup Was CIA Affiliation

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Early in the summer of 1946 Kim Philby relinquished his London department to take an important new post "in the field." He went to Turkey under diplomatic cover, ostensibly as temporary First Secretary with the British Embassy, stationed in Istanbul and in charge of passport control. His real work, of course, was still spying for the Secret Intelligence Service. The Diplomatic Service, who appeared to be his employers, were in fact only his hosts.

Philby clearly did not lose any rank by going out to Turkey. His subsequent appointment to Washington, if nothing else,

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proves that. But the nature of his work did change sharply once he went out "into the field." He was then bound to come into working contact with the Soviet espionage networks—and thus he projected into a position where his real work as a Soviet spy was not in any external way distinguishable from his pretense of being a British spy. Whether Philby took the lead in persuading his British superiors to send him to Turkey we do not know. But if he did not do so, he should have, because once he was in the field he was almost impregnable.

IN THIS CONTEXT, the British Government's terse admission, 17 years later, that they knew the truth about Philby's loyalty makes interesting reading. In 1963 Edward Heath said that the British were "now aware" that Philby had "worked for the Soviet authorities before 1946." (Authors' italics.) In other words, the knowledge that Philby had worked for the Soviets after 1946 was not new—he was working for them to the extent that any field agent must do so in order to survive. What was new was that he had been working for them all along.

Istanbul had been an important neutral center in the war against Germany. Now, the East-West confrontation gave it an even greater importance. It was at the center of a cold war which seemed likely to go hot at the drop of an ultimatum. Turkey has a long border with Soviet Union and another border with Communist Bulgaria.

In the 1940s Stalin was loudly claiming a slice of Eastern Turkey plus the right to put Russian bases on the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles. The Turks, in reply, were clamoring for Western military aid. A civil war was raging in nearby Greece which looked as though it could easily go Communist. Much Communist shipping passes through the Bosphorus, and Istanbul has flourishing communities of Armenians, Georgians, Bulgarians, and Albanians, with direct links to the homeland communities behind the Iron Curtain. A better place to make contact with spies would be hard to find.

The Turks, of course, knew fairly soon that Philby was an SIS man. Indeed, a man on the Istanbul newspaper *Cumhuriyet* once asked Philby if he would be interviewed for a feature article on "The Spies of Istanbul." Kim discreetly refused. All that the Turkish security men noted was that Philby used to have meetings with "students" from Communist Balkan states—but as that was his job, who cared?

In Turkey Philby spent a good deal of time traveling around the Lake Van district close to the Soviet border. He kept an odd souvenir of the period which in later years he displayed in his apartment in Beirut: a large photograph of Mount Ararat which stands on the Turkish-Soviet border. Most people who recognized the double-humped shape of the mountain would puzzle over the picture, much to Philby's amusement. Some of the more technically-minded would believe that they had solved the puzzle: the print had been made with the negative reversed; the little hump was on the left instead of on the right. This would amuse Philby even more and he would point out that the little hump was only on the left when the mountain was viewed from the Turkish side. The view from the Russian side was, like the photograph, the other way around.

THE PICTURE seems to have been an apt symbol of Philby's enigmatic status. Clearly, throughout his Turkish period, he was closely in touch with the Soviet intelligence network and equally clearly his superiors in London knew this. The vital question is how far the superiors had given him permission to venture into this moral twilight. The authors have had confirmation that Philby had been given permission to play the full double game with the Russians—to pretend to them that he was a British agent willing to work for them: which, unknown to London, was exactly

what he was. This is the only way to explain the passionate defense of Philby by his colleagues of the SIS when the security officers of MI 5 were convinced that he was a traitor. It was to be some time yet before things did go wrong for Philby but when the day came the SIS stood by him with an extraordinary, apparently inexplicable determination.

In the meantime his star was still high and his biggest coup was still to come: In 1949 he was sent to Washington, with the rank of First Secretary, to be the SIS liaison man with the fledgling Central Intelligence Agency. It is difficult to exaggerate the importance of this posting. The Central Intelligence Agency had been set up in 1947 and although beginning to feel its strength still tended to regard the SIS with some awe. Between the two existed what CIA officers describe as "a very special relationship," and with it, "an amazingly free exchange of information" took place. Philby was right in the heart of this. His contacts ranged from the director, a tough ex-Army man, General Bedell Smith, down through the ranks. He was privy to CIA planning; he told the CIA what the SIS was doing; he was often briefed by Bedell Smith himself on top policy and, above all, he knew what the CIA knew about Soviet operations.

This, by itself, would have more than satisfied Philby's Russian controller, but he was able to improve on it. Like most agencies of its type the CIA is compartmentalized as a protection against penetration—no one department knows the whole story. But an agent is prey to a normal man's need to talk to someone about his job and the only person he can talk safely to is another agent. In the CIA that other agent was often Philby. Because he was cleared to speak with Bedell Smith, Philby was cleared right through every department and merely by drinking around he could have learned more about the agency and its operations than any man except the director and perhaps one or two of his assistants. A high-ranking CIA officer, now retired, told us: "How much did Philby know? The sky was the limit. He would have known as much as he wanted to find out."

This explains the reason for the silence that has surrounded Philby's period with the CIA. If an intelligence agency has one or two men whose careers are going well, and these men—through no fault of their own—are "blown," the agency immediately retires them. This may appear ruthless but is obviously essential. What happens—as it did with the CIA and Philby—when the entire agency is "blown?" There is no choice but to cover up, reorganize, and keep going. When the extent of Philby's treachery was finally realized the CIA had no choice (short of disbanding the whole organization) but to smile bravely and carry on.